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VICARS AND MANAGERS
Organizing for National Security

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PREFACE

This essay was written about two years ago as part of a conference to assess the implications of recent legislation requiring the president to report annually to the Congress on his "grand strategy" for the United States. My assignment was to consider what a "grand strategy" for the United States might look like and might mean from the perspective of the State Department (where I had served from 1977 to 1985).

The resulting analysis expresses great skepticism about the prospects for a "grand strategy" if that term is meant to describe an integrated and comprehensive set of operational goals that would yield long-term continuity in U.S. foreign and national security policy. It is somewhat more optimistic about the chances for a "grand strategy" defined as a *structure and process* that would improve the internal consistency and coherence of a given administration's national security policy. This latter, admittedly more modest, perspective leads to an evaluation of alternative ways in which a president might try to organize his national security machinery, and of the various roles the State Department and the NSC staff could play.

This essay is being reproduced as a RAND Paper at this time in the interests of informing the debate about how the new president should design his national security process, and what the appropriate relationship between the secretary of state and the national security adviser might be. A version of the paper also is scheduled to appear as "A Grand Strategy for the United States: The View from State" in Gregory D. Foster, editor, *Toward a U.S. Grand Strategy*, (St. Martins Press, forthcoming).



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VICARS AND MANAGERS Organizing for National Security¹

Arnold Kanter

A "grand strategy for America" has an attractive, almost seductive, ring. Not only does it sound like something that a mature superpower ought to have, but a "grand strategy" would seem to hold the promise of enhancing the internal coherence and long-term continuity of U.S. policy in the world. It would reduce the conflicts and confusion within the administration, and inhibit Washington's tendency to speak in a babble of voices. It would seem a good way to curb, if not eliminate, the disputes between a Kissinger and a Rogers, a Vance and a Brzezinski, a Shultz and a Weinberger that seem to afflict (and frequently embarrass) every recent administration. It presumably would be welcomed by our friends--and perhaps our adversaries--who regularly complain about the vagaries and unpredictability of American foreign policy. Accordingly, one's initial instinct is that a "grand strategy" is a self-evidently desirable objective, that the U.S. ought to have one, and if--as most observers would agree--we do not now have anything that warrants that characterization, it is an important defect to be remedied.

One likewise would expect the secretary of state to be the logical candidate to formulate such a plan for the President. Most recent presidents have opened their administrations by publicly anointing their secretary of state as chief foreign policy adviser and spokesman. Some have reacted to the experience of their immediate predecessor by insisting that foreign policy would be made in the State Department rather than by the NSC staff. If the U.S. does not now have a grand strategy, one accordingly might be tempted to attribute the shortcoming to the State Department. If one sought to devise such a strategy, one might nevertheless be inclined to assign the job to State, if only for want of a better bureaucratic alternative.

A moment's reflection, however, would lead to the observation that whatever their early pronouncements, presidents soon find themselves looking increasingly to their NSC adviser and his staff both for the formulation of foreign policy issues and options, and for the public articulation of the choices, their interrelationships, and their rationale. This seemingly inexorable trend raises questions about how well equipped State is to take the lead in designing a grand strategy, and then overseeing its implementation.

This paper attempts to describe what a "grand strategy" plausibly might mean in a U.S. context given a variety of political and institutional facts of life. It then analyzes the comparative strengths and weaknesses of the State Department and other institutional actors in the formulation and implementation of a "grand strategy" for the U.S.

"Grand Strategy" and "Foreign Policy Planning"

A "grand strategy" is a particular kind of "plan." Like any plan, a "strategy" is a way of relating means to ends, and for choosing one or more paths to accomplish the objectives identified. It may be "grand" in the sense that it seeks to encompass and integrate all of the instruments of national power--diplomatic, economic, political, and moral as well as military--and/or in the sense that it seeks to establish priorities among all of our national objectives (perhaps excluding those that are purely "domestic"). It clearly is intended to connote something more comprehensive than a defense strategy (e.g., nuclear deterrence, flexible response) which, it should be noted, we have enjoyed some success in fashioning and implementing. In brief, a grand strategy seems to hold the promise of clear identification of broad national purposes, and the efficient use of all of our national resources in a coherent and sustained manner to achieve those goals. In a general sense, therefore, it is roughly equivalent to what often is meant by U.S. "foreign policy" in the broadest sense, i.e., harnessing the full panoply of policy instruments and power resources to the achievement of U.S. objectives in the world. Unless otherwise noted, the terms *grand strategy* and *foreign*

policy will be used interchangeably in this paper. Whether the State Department is able, much less best positioned, to conduct foreign policy in this broad sense will be discussed below.

The goals of a grand strategy, like planning in general, are almost unanimously regarded as important, if not essential: who would deny the virtues of clarity, efficiency, coherence, and continuity in national policy? And in a manner that closely resembles the perspectives of senior executives in the private sector about corporate planning, most policy officials would agree that the United States *ought* to have a "grand strategy," some may believe that we do, and the rest may feel a little guilty that we do not. But just as widespread beliefs in the virtues of "long-range planning" are rarely matched by regular efforts to do it in the corporate world, so too it is hard to find in the postwar historical record sustained, much less successful, efforts within the government to fashion a grand strategy. Such plans as are devised often are disconnected from the concrete issues that policymakers face and the choices they must make. In brief, almost everyone believes in the value and utility of a grand strategy, but senior officials rarely seem to try to fashion one and succeed even less often.²

How can this apparent paradox be explained? It is not sufficient to observe that the design of a grand strategy is an enormous--and enormously difficult--intellectual and organizational task. While that is undeniably the case, such an explanation would better account for the lack of *success* in designing a strategy than for the observed absence of a serious, sustained effort to *try*. It almost certainly would be a mistake to attribute the paradox to the cynicism of politicians who say one thing and mean another. But there are a variety of political factors that make it difficult, if not all but impossible, to fashion a grand strategy.

"Grand Strategy" and the American Political System: Prospects for Long-Term Continuity

Putting aside the substantial question of whether American history and culture are sympathetic or antagonistic to the pursuit of a grand strategy, two broad political

features--one an accumulation of postwar facts of life and the other a growing trend--would seem to be serious obstacles to the design and conduct of an enduring grand strategy for the U.S. (As will be argued below, they also interfere with the efforts of individual administrations to conduct a coherent and consistent foreign policy.)

The political facts are our two-party system, the electoral pressure on the opposition to pose alternatives to the policies of the incumbents, and the seemingly irresistible urge of new administrations to design their policies and procedures in *reaction* to the perceived shortcomings of their predecessors, i.e., to do business in different, and almost intendedly opposite, ways. In particular, it is almost as if incoming presidents consciously design their national security policy processes to be *mirror images* of the procedures adopted by their predecessors, as each struggles to escape from the insoluble organizational problem of simultaneously achieving both systematic, comprehensive decisionmaking and bureaucratic responsiveness. Thus, the formal NSC system of an Eisenhower gives way to the free-wheeling style of a Kennedy, and a Richard Allen is made a second-class bureaucratic citizen in reaction to perceived overcentralization in the NSC staffs of a Brzezinski or a Kissinger.

These facts of life encourage pendulum-like swings in the process and content of policy as one administration succeeds the other. To overstate the case, simply to suggest that the test of a successful grand strategy is the extent to which it guides (if not binds) the policies of successive presidents is to argue that efforts to achieve a grand strategy are all but doomed to fail. It is unrealistic to aspire to a strategy that at once transcends the results of the electoral process and commands the support of its stream of victors. It also may be undesirable.

Nor is this merely a consequence of shifts between Republican and Democratic presidents. While changes in political control of the White House tend to exacerbate these oscillations, Johnson was not a simple continuation of Kennedy. Even Ford was not a straight line extension of Nixon, despite the fact that many of the national security personnel

as well as much of the decision-making machinery continued in place following the latter's resignation. It likewise is easy to speculate about possible *Republican* successors to Reagan whose views about U.S. national security goals, policies, and strategies are observably different from those of the incumbent president.

Historically, foreign policy has been somewhat buffered from the effects of these facts of American political life. By extension, the centrifugal forces that are the enemy of grand strategy were more or less contained. But postwar trends have eroded the protected status of foreign policy and have increased the obstacles to the formulation and execution of a grand strategy. Perhaps most noteworthy among these has been the decline of bipartisanship, and increasing Congressional involvement in foreign policy.

While hardly a sufficient condition for success, it is difficult to imagine a grand strategy without a domestic political consensus. Yet, it has become a commonplace to observe--if not deplore--the decline of bipartisanship in foreign policy. Some of this commentary, however, seems to imply that both the decline, and the hopes for a revival, of bipartisanship in foreign policy are largely a matter of the attitudes and decisions of political leaders. In essence, it assumes--or wishes for--an ability to keep politics out of foreign policy. Put differently, it hopes for a return to the time when the President's conduct of foreign policy was insulated from Congress, domestic political issues, and electoral campaigns.

But active, unapologetic Congressional involvement in foreign and defense policy has been a feature of the American political landscape at least since Vietnam, i.e., for at least twenty years. It no longer can be considered a short-term aberration. The issues on which Congress is prepared to "second guess" the president have increased in scope and number to the point where virtually no subject bearing on U.S. behavior in the international arena is deemed to be out of bounds. Nor is this simply a matter of Republicans versus Democrats. As South Africa demonstrates, Ronald Reagan can have as much trouble commanding the votes of Republican senators as Jimmy Carter did in securing Democratic support for a long

list of foreign policy initiatives, ranging from SALT to human rights.

At the same time, the exponential growth and increasing professionalization of Congressional staff, and the expansion of analytical resources in agencies such as the General Accounting Office, Congressional Budget Office, Congressional Research Service, and Office of Technology Assessment have combined with an expanding web of legislated reporting requirements to impart a kind of bureaucratic momentum to the Hill's foreign policy involvement. As a result, a substantial and active Congressional role is likely to persist, even if its differences with the administration over specific policies and issues abate.

In brief, Congress is--and is likely to remain--an important *institutional* actor in the foreign policy process whatever the extent of partisan differences at any given time. Plans for designing and conducting a grand strategy, accordingly, must include the Congress. The centrifugal forces that have been operating within that institution, however, complicate any such effort. There is considerable merit in administration officials' complaints that even with the best of intentions, consultations with an increasingly fragmented Congress have become somewhere between futile and impossible. With a leadership less and less able to speak for the rest of the members, it sometimes must seem to these administration officials as though anything short of consulting with each of the 535 members is insufficient.

Because Congress is an intendedly and inescapably political body, these twin factors --increasing foreign policy activism by an increasingly fragmented institution--cannot be substantially changed by displays of good will and statesmanship by political leaders. They combine with a biennial (rather than quadriennial) cycle of elections to make any early return to bipartisanship in foreign policy a long-odds proposition. They likewise represent impressive barriers to the formulation and execution of a grand strategy that enjoys consistency during administrations, much less continuity across the tenure of presidents. Moreover, they reinforce--and are reinforced by--another trend: the growing interdependence of domestic and foreign policy. Even if Congress somehow resolved to stay out of foreign

policy and confine itself to domestic politics, more and more it would find itself confronting a distinction without a difference.

One of the reasons why politics no longer stops at the water's edge is because foreign policy increasingly intrudes into the "domestic" issues that are the central concerns of our political system. The growth of the global economy means that acts of omission and commission by other nations not only bear on our security, but more and more also directly affect the interests, well-being, livelihoods--and votes--of a broad range of domestic constituencies. As issues such as grain sales to the Soviet Union, agricultural subsidies to American farmers, and "voluntary" restrictions on Japanese auto imports indicate, the line between "domestic" and "foreign" policy issues is not simply becoming increasingly blurred, but seems to be well on its way to disappearing. This phenomenon both increases the conceptual burdens on those who would design a grand strategy by obliging them to take account of a broad range of nominally domestic as well as international concerns, and diminishes the practical prospects for success by embracing issues whose dispositions have long been subject to the pulling and hauling that is politics.³

All of these forces come together in the electoral process, both in the elections themselves and the increasingly long campaigns that lead up to them. They virtually ensure that foreign policy issues will figure prominently, even when nominally domestic concerns top the political agenda. They all but guarantee that the outcome of elections will alter--perhaps dramatically--whatever we have in the way of a grand strategy, unless its content is so vacuous as to be substantially immune to changes in real world policies, decisions, and actions. They suggest that if an essential objective of a grand strategy is *long term* continuity in this country's strategies and priorities, then the search for a grand strategy for the United States may be quixotic.

"Grand Strategy" and the American Political System: Prospects for Coherence

One could easily imagine, however, a less demanding goal for a grand strategy: *internal coherence* of policies during the tenures of administrations. Rather than conceiving of "grand strategy" as a framework that would bind successive presidents, one might think instead in terms of the more modest objective of designing a plan that would direct the decisions and actions of any particular administration. In brief, this concept of grand strategy proceeds from the premise that the American political system is less and less able to entertain the objective of consistency across administrations, and instead should aim to achieve consistency and coherence within administrations.

Even this goal, however, runs into several uncongenial facts of life. Some already have been mentioned, including the changing role of Congress, and the merging of domestic and foreign policy. Many of the same developments that cast a pall over the prospects for long-term strategic coherence also work against the development and implementation of a consistent set of policies between presidential elections. There are additional factors as well that help to explain why everybody seems to talk about a grand strategy, but one is rarely if ever put in place.

Primary among these is that any plan requires decisions and choices. Obvious as this is, it does nothing to diminish the fact that political leaders face strong incentives to make neither. Decisions, of course, get made all the time, but rarely with enthusiasm, and more often too late than too soon. To make decisions is to focus responsibility, invite assessment and criticism, and close off options, to commit oneself before all the information is in (it never is), and all of the consequences are known (they never are). These perverse incentives, which are endemic to the system rather than shortcomings of particular incumbents, are one more obstacle to the formulation of a grand strategy.

Perhaps the only thing more difficult for leaders than making strategic choices is to announce them. For a politician to publicize choices or enunciate priorities is to shortchange

some interests and some constituencies, both at home and abroad. To do either is to pick fights, spend political capital, and perhaps make more enemies than friends. Indeed, the same foreign governments that bemoan the absence of a clear and consistent direction in U.S. foreign policy are also quick to complain about any real or imagined statement of priorities that appears to put them somewhere other than in the top rank. Consequently, speeches and public documents are much more likely to be statements of aspirations, abstract goals, and largely undifferentiated wish lists than descriptions of clear choices. These documents, however, are the vehicle by which a grand strategy not only would be conveyed to our friends and adversaries abroad and the public at home, they also are a key means of communication with the executive branch bureaucracies which would be responsible for carrying it out.

Probably the closest statement we now have to a grand strategy is the Secretary of Defense's *Annual Report*. On the one hand, it ranges far beyond a description of military policy and problems to a relatively broad survey of our national security objectives, the threats we face, and instruments we have at our disposal or plan to acquire. (In fact, there is a statutory requirement that the secretary of defense consult with the secretary of state in the preparation of his *Annual Report*.) On the other hand, since its inception more than two decades ago, one regularly would look in vain for clear statements of interests which, while important, were less than vital, of friends and allies who occupied a second rather than first rank, and of programs that were valuable, but not essential. The fact that the *Annual Report* accompanies the proposed Defense Department budget and is intended to explain and justify to the Congress the tough resource allocation choices being proposed makes these features all the more striking.⁴

Succumbing to these pressures is hardly peculiar to the Pentagon. During the Nixon administration, the president issued an annual "state of the world" message, consciously patterned after the SecDef's *Annual Report*, which Kissinger described "as a conceptual outline of the President's foreign policy, . . . a status report, and . . . an agenda for action."⁵

Kissinger complained that the State Department draft sought: "... to please every bureaucratic fiefdom in that unwieldy structure; with every desk officer insisting on a mention of his country or countries of responsibility, the State Department draft was not distinguished by conceptual thrust or the ability to make any particular point."⁶ These pressures are endemic and pervasive. While some bureaucratic actors may be more susceptible than others, none is immune. Indeed, those who try regularly to ignore them often become bureaucratic casualties, either before or after they have caused political injury to senior officials. Much as we may admire "decisive leadership," for good and understandable reasons incrementalism is a much more typical style of decisionmaking.⁷ If we already had a serviceable grand strategy, such behavior probably would be beneficial because it would discourage large and abrupt shifts. Incrementalism, however, surely must be regarded as the enemy of efforts to formulate and articulate a grand strategy.

Finally, it must be observed that the executive branch simply is not organized very well to formulate a grand strategy.⁸ The division of labor and specialization of function that results from the quantity and complexity of the business of government produces an organizational structure that is ill-suited to the task. At the same time, even with the best of will and the most modest of egos, the domains of senior officials overlap, even as their interests and perspectives diverge. "Major" foreign policy issues, almost by definition, affect the responsibilities of several agencies and require conscious interagency coordination.

While a good case can be made that the State Department may be the best of the available bureaucracies to do that job--as will be discussed below--it also suffers from some serious handicaps, not least of which are a lack of control over the resources needed to translate a strategic concept into concrete policies, a reluctance to set priorities by choosing among its clients, and an understandable resistance to incorporating domestic political factors into its analysis. If Kissinger's characterization of the State Department's efforts to draft the "state of the world" report is exaggerated, it may not be by much.

The other leading candidate for the job, the NSC staff, has its own shortcomings. That staff typically is small, overworked, and harried. It often experiences relatively high turnover during administrations and wholesale replacement when the new president assumes office. To perform its main functions well, it needs bureaucratic operators who may or may not be equally impressive strategic thinkers. If the NSC staff has the virtue of propinquity to the White House, that is not the same as being *in* the White House. While it lacks any independent bureaucratic stakes (or power base) and exists only to serve the interests of the president, it may not know his mind. In particular, while it is in a better position than the State Department, there is no obvious reason to believe that the NSC staff is especially well equipped to perform the integration of domestic and foreign policy or to make the domestic political calculations that, for the reasons described above, would be indispensable ingredients of a successful grand strategy. (Conversely, those in the White House whose expertise resides in the realm of domestic policy and politics usually are not well versed in foreign policy, much less grand strategy.) It is perhaps only a slight overstatement to observe that there is no place outside the Oval Office which has both the breadth of perspective and the institutional resources which are required for this job.

There is no assurance, however, that the president himself would be able to fashion a grand strategy, even in broadest outline. Putting aside the abundant other demands on his time and resources, it must be acknowledged that most new presidents have concentrated for months and years on *becoming* president rather than on what they will *do* in office. Moreover, we do not require presidents to be strategic thinkers, nor do we regularly award electoral victory to the candidate who best displays those qualities. There may be no substitute for presidential direction in shaping a grand strategy and there can be no doubt about its desirability, but there also can be no assurance that it will be forthcoming, particularly in the early days of an administration when a strategy would best be designed and set in motion.

"Grand Strategy" as Orderly Process

Perhaps overdrawn, this litany of obstacles, handicaps, hurdles, and barriers has been intended to have a sobering effect on those who call for (or insist on) comprehensiveness and continuity in setting the goals of a grand strategy. Although these characteristics may seem to be synonymous with any meaningful concept of strategy, such features are as difficult to achieve as they are easy to describe. As in other areas of endeavor where pursuit of the best can sacrifice achievement of the good, the "grander" the strategy in scope or duration, the more likely it is to result in little more than harmless cliches.

A more modest, but probably more achievable, objective would be to strengthen the coherence and consistency of an administration's policies by improving the *process* by which they are made and executed. To the extent that the policy process can increase the coordination among (and perhaps integration of) these policies, we will have made some progress toward the goal of a grand strategy. This view of grand strategy is less that of a deductively derived blueprint, than of inductively constructed policies and guidelines.

To achieve a grand strategy that is designed by the invisible hand of a well-functioning policy process requires careful consideration of the appropriate roles and responsibilities of the major institutional actors. All would agree with the common sense observation that the State Department must be centrally involved, but there the consensus ends. It is to the subject of the appropriate role of the secretary of state and the State Department in policy process to which we now turn.

The Role of the State Department in Grand Strategy

There is relatively widespread agreement on several premises. One is that, in practice, the decision-making process reflects the tastes, preferences, and prejudices of the incumbent president. As Brzezinski observed in reflecting on his tenure as Carter's national security adviser: "Ultimately, every decision-making system is a creature of the President, and each

President has his own distinctive style."⁹ It therefore is futile and naive to describe in the abstract what role the State Department or any other actor *should* play in the policy process. Each president will decide that for himself in light of his "management principles," the role he envisages for himself in foreign policy, the "lessons" he learned from observing the experiences of his predecessors, his opinion of the Department of State and the foreign service, and the personalities he has selected to fill the senior positions in his administration (as well as the reasons he selected them). The best one can do is to identify some alternative roles that State can play in the decision-making process and assess the advantages and disadvantages of each.

There also seems to be relatively widespread agreement on the principle that, other than the president himself, the secretary of state should be the primary *spokesman* and *negotiator* for the administration's foreign policy. One motivation seems to be to get the government to speak with one voice by the simple expedient of having one person do most of the talking with foreign governments and, to a lesser extent, domestic audiences. For good reason, there appears to be an almost insurmountable presumption that that one person ought to be the secretary of state: his job and that of the Department of State is, in the first instance, *representational*. In practice, however, even that presumption has regularly been overcome.

Cyrus Vance believed that he had such an understanding with Carter, but that Brzezinski constantly encroached upon it. Vance writes:

Only the president and his secretary of state were to have the responsibility for defining the administration's foreign policy publicly. As time went on, there developed an increasingly serious breach of this understanding. Despite his stated acceptance of this principle, Brzezinski would attempt increasingly to take on the role of policy spokesman. . . . Eventually, as the divergences grew wider between my public statements and his policy utterances, Brzezinski's practice became a serious impediment to the conduct of our policy.¹

According to his first secretary of state, Ronald Reagan agrees with Jimmy Carter about one thing, *viz.*, that in order to ensure that the government speaks with one voice on foreign policy, the secretary of state should be the administration's principal spokesman. Ironically,

Reagan cites the experience of the Nixon administration as an example of what *not* to do. Haig quotes Reagan: "You know my feeling about the Secretary of State.... [H]e would be *the* spokesman. I won't have a repeat of the Kissinger-Rogers situation. I'll look to you, Al."¹¹

Looking back on the Kissinger-Rogers relationship (if that is the right word), Haig observes:

This experience, along with others . . . had convinced me . . . there could be only one official in the government responsible, under the President, for the formulation of foreign policy and for its public enunciation. That official could be the Secretary of State or he could be the National Security Adviser; for that matter, he could be anyone the President chose But whoever that man was, he had to be the President's man, chosen by the President, trusted by the President, and in daily contact and communication with the President. He, and he alone, had to speak for the President on matters of policy on those occasions when the President chose not to speak for himself." ¹²

Haig thus establishes several implicit tests of a good foreign policy process: (a) responsibility under the president should be concentrated in *one* person; (b) that person should be responsible both for overseeing the *formulation* of foreign policy and for its public *articulation*; and (c) that person should be in *daily contact* and communication with the President. Haig, of course, thought he knew who that one person should be. He told Reagan:

You must have a single manager who can integrate the views of all your Cabinet officers and prepare for you a range of policy choices. I believe it requires that the Secretary of State be your vicar for the community of departments having an interest in the several dimensions of foreign policy.¹³

A good case can be made in support of Haig's view that the secretary of state and the department that he heads are best situated to be the "single manager" of the interagency process. First, and most obvious, "foreign policy" is their primary responsibility. The State Department is our best window on the world, with its embassies both reporting on developments that affect U.S. interests, and promoting those interests with their respective host governments. Given that our national security strategy is, and for the foreseeable future is likely to remain, embedded in a network of alliances and defense treaties, conduct of the State Department's responsibilities

is especially vital to the implementation of any grand strategy. Staffed by career professionals, who not only are well trained to perform their jobs but also are somewhat insulated from the deleterious effects of high personnel turnover, it encourages policy stability and continuity.¹⁴ Hundreds of times the size of the NSC staff, it has a depth of expertise which the Executive Office of the President cannot match. Even if one adopts a broad definition of "foreign policy," the State Department measures up well, supplemented by staff detailed from other agencies (notably military officers on assignment) and/or expert in diverse fields. There is no other agency with the same breadth of perspective. There is no other place in the administration where the strands of foreign policy--and the ingredients of grand strategy--come together so well.

Given his view of what was needed and who was best able to provide it, Haig obligingly prepared a plan for organizing the Reagan administration's national security policy process with himself and the State Department at its center and submitted it to the new president shortly before inauguration day.¹⁵ It was never approved and, in fact, the Reagan administration went for more than a year without *any* National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) promulgating its procedures for considering major policy issues. By the time the NSDD was issued, it had been substantially overtaken by events and, in many respects, the NSC staff had eclipsed the State Department in managing the interagency process.

The Role of the Secretary of State: Alternative Perspectives

What went wrong? The answer lies beyond the distrust of a particular administration's White House staff for the possible presidential ambitions of an aggressive, and often abrasive, secretary of state. An acceptable explanation for similar episodes over the last quarter century must go beyond a story about strong personalities and the clash of their egos. At least since Dean Rusk and McGeorge Bundy, each administration has seen responsibility for managing the foreign policy process either start in or gravitate to the NSC staff. Whatever presidential candidates may say about the concept of the role of the secretary of state, their preference for

cabinet government, and their determination to prevent a concentration of authority in the NSC staff, sooner or later they find themselves presiding over a process dominated by the national security adviser. How come?

Part of the answer lies in the foreign policy role that presidents decide to play themselves because it shapes the roles others can fill. Nixon explains:

When Eisenhower selected Foster Dulles as his Secretary of State, he wanted him to be his chief foreign policy adviser, a role Dulles was uniquely qualified to fill. From the outset of my administration, however, I planned to direct foreign policy from the White House. Therefore, I regarded my choice of National Security Adviser as crucial.¹⁶

Carter expressed a similar sentiment in acknowledging some of the concerns voiced about his selection of Brzezinski to be his national security adviser, viz., that he "might not be adequately deferential to a secretary of state." Carter continues: "Knowing Zbig, I realized that some of these assessments were accurate, but they were in accord with what I wanted: the final decisions on basic foreign policy would be made by me in the Oval Office, and not in the State Department."¹⁷ And Brzezinski quotes Carter in late 1980 as stating: "There have been Presidents in the past, maybe not too distant past, that let their Secretaries of State make foreign policy. I don't."¹⁸

Presidents who are determined to play an active role in foreign policy are likely to be unwilling to delegate much responsibility for the formulation of foreign policy to their secretary of state: activist presidents do not need, and sometimes cannot tolerate, activist secretaries of state. They are more likely to look for advice and staff support to their national security advisers, who are always at hand and ordinarily see the president daily, and who lack a power base that is independent of him. As Brzezinski observed: "... Carter's own involvement in foreign affairs made it possible for the NSC to exercise strict control on his behalf."¹⁹ If only one person below the president is to be responsible for foreign policy, the NSC adviser's propinquity to the oval office and daily contact with the president may be sufficient by themselves to make him, rather than the secretary of state, Haig's "single manager."

This presidential perspective may be reinforced by a mistrust of, or a frustration with, the State Department. Nor is this a new problem. Franklin Roosevelt once observed: "You should go through the experience of trying to get any changes in the thinking, policy, and action of career diplomats and then you'd know what a real problem was."²⁰ Kissinger attributes Nixon's choice of William Rogers to be Secretary of State in part to the new president's low regard for the State Department. "... [B]ecause of his distrust of the Foreign Service, Nixon wanted a strong executive who would ensure State Department support of the President's policies."²¹ Nixon himself writes that he expected that: "Bill Rogers, a strong administrator, would have the formidable job of managing the recalcitrant bureaucracy of the State Department."²² According to Brzezinski, Carter also did not hold the State Department in high regard: "Carter made no secret of the fact that he thought that State was sluggish in developing policy initiatives, and he was particularly impatient with State Department double talk."²³ Put differently, the State Department's major strengths are, from the perspective of the White House, also major liabilities. Many presidents see it as large, unwieldy, unresponsive to their direction, and insensitive to the interplay of domestic and foreign policy. Their NSC staffs, while lacking many of the resources and advantages of State, also do not have its weaknesses.

Even if presidents do not insist on being their own secretaries of state and do have a high regard for the capabilities and performance of the State Department, however, it still may not be a good choice to operate the interagency policy process, and its leader may not be the best candidate to be the "vicar" of foreign policy. Perhaps the best evidence of this proposition is afforded by the experience of the Reagan administration. By most accounts, Reagan does not play a day-to-day role in foreign policy, much less insist on being his own secretary of state. The procedures that have been established designate the State Department to chair most of the interagency groups. Yet, the media regularly report on policy differences between Shultz and Weinberger (just as they reported on Haig's disputes with a variety of administration officials),

divergent official explanations of major administration foreign policy decisions, and confusion within the bureaucracy. In brief, even though Reagan has said that his secretary of state is his principal foreign policy adviser, architect, and spokesman, and even though the State Department formally heads key interagency policy mechanisms, few observers would credit this administration with greater foreign policy consistency and coherence than its recent predecessors. Indeed, many would make the opposite judgment.

Not only has the State Department been unable to achieve--or enforce--coherence in policy *formulation*, it and the secretary of state have been unable regularly to ensure that policy, once decided, would be fully and faithfully *implemented*. The reasons are that the State Department lacks the *authority* to prevail in the interagency debates about what our policy should be, and lacks control of the *resources* necessary for implementation of whatever is decided. At best, the State Department is seen by the other bureaucratic actors as *primus inter pares* on foreign policy issues, but without any special authority or claims to impartiality that should lead them to yield to its views. At worst, it will be seen as being as (or more) parochial as any other agency, entitled to advocate its position, but not to be architect of the options nor custodian of the process. As Kissinger observed:

A President should not leave the presentation of his options to one of the Cabinet departments or agencies. Since the views of the departments are often in conflict, to place one in charge of presenting the options will be perceived by the others as giving it an unfair advantage.²⁴

Putting State in that position simply denies bureaucratic legitimacy to the results. There is unlikely to be policy coherence or consistency because, in the eyes of the losers, nothing has been settled and they will continue to go their separate ways.

However and by whomever decided, moreover, the conduct of foreign policy requires the cooperation of other agencies because they control the necessary military, intelligence, and economic resources that are the primary policy instruments available to a secretary of state. That cooperation is unlikely to be forthcoming if the other participants believe that they have been

denied bureaucratic "due process," and that State has used its control of the interagency machinery to serve its parochial interests: when the secretary of state is the "vicar" of foreign policy, the result could be a foreign policy which, in practice, ranges between ineffectiveness and paralysis. In brief, it may not be in the interest of the State Department, however broadly or parochially defined, to be in charge of the foreign policy process.

In principle, a president could make a State Department-led process work by enforcing the decisions that emerged and by backing up his secretary whenever the latter's decisions were challenged. This, however, would amount to the elevation of the secretary of state above the other senior members of the Cabinet, something most presidents would be reluctant to do. In fact, the record demonstrates that their rhetoric notwithstanding, recent presidents from the beginning rely on or quickly turn to their national security adviser and NSC staff. Indeed, it is hard to find any examples of a successful State-centered national security policy process during the past quarter century with the *possible* exception of Kissinger's tenure as secretary of state, (and Kissinger's experience at State cannot be understood apart from his earlier--and, for a time, continuing--role as national security adviser). In brief, both logic and history argue that the interagency process is better managed by the NSC staff than by the State Department.

State and NSC: A Division of Labor

The foregoing analysis does not necessarily leave the secretary of state with nothing to do nor elevate the national security adviser to a supra-Cabinet status. It does argue, however, for a reconsideration of the "management principles" laid down by Haig. As noted above, Haig believes that a single official under the president should be responsible for virtually every facet of foreign policy. These duties include: (a) principal *spokesman* and negotiator, (b) principal *adviser*, and (c) *manager* of the process by which policy (and strategy) is formulated. If the present analysis is roughly right, then Haig's all-or-nothing prescription may well leave the secretary of state with nothing.

Kissinger, by contrast, argues for a division of labor: "Though I did not think so at the time, I have become convinced that a President should make the Secretary of State his principal adviser and use the national security adviser primarily as a senior administrator and coordinator to make certain that each significant point of view is heard."²⁵ That is, the secretary of state would perform the first two jobs identified by Haig, but the national security adviser and, by extension, the NSC staff would be responsible for managing the interagency process which identifies the issues and generates the options. The State Department would be one of the central players, but would be cast as an acknowledged advocate rather than as a disinterested, objective coordinator. Accordingly, it would not be called upon to chair the interagency meetings or frame the options for the president's decision.

Under this scheme, the impact of the State Department would depend on the relationship between the secretary of state and the president, i.e., on the performance of the former in his capacity as principal foreign policy adviser. Kissinger observes: "A determined Secretary of State cannot fail to have his view heard whoever chairs the committees. . . . The influence of the Department of State would flow from the personal confidence between the President and the Secretary and the quality of the analytical work produced by the Department."²⁶ Finally, Kissinger would be careful to make the secretary of state the administration's principal foreign policy spokesman, both to reinforce his position as the president's chief foreign policy adviser and to avoid confusion at home and abroad about what our foreign policy is.²⁷

Based on the record of recent administrations, the Kissinger division of labor has greater *a priori* appeal than the scheme recommended by Haig. (Their respective experiences as secretary of state seem argue for the same choice.) There is no guarantee that an NSC-led interagency process would yield consistent and coherent, much less, good policy. But the NSC staff does seem to be in a better bureaucratic position than State both to play honest broker among the competing perspectives of the concerned national security agencies and to speak for the president.

At the same time, the Kissinger design assumes personalities and relationships that hardly can be taken for granted. He notes that the national security adviser should be "chosen for fairness, conceptual grasp, bureaucratic savvy, and a willingness to labor anonymously." ²⁸ Although Kissinger cites Andrew Goodpastor and Brent Scowcroft as two examples of national security advisers who embody this combination of traits--personalities who combine strategic vision, political toughness, impartiality, and self-abnegation--they surely are more the exception than the rule. In particular, it is hard to expect a national security adviser regularly to present policy options and their implications to the president without revealing any personal preference. It is harder still to expect his bureaucratic counterparts to believe that he always will behave in such a disinterested manner. Indeed, Kissinger himself is probably the best example of what happens when someone who does not have a widespread reputation for "fairness" much less a "willingness to labor anonymously" is responsible for operating the interagency machinery.

Kissinger likewise observes that: "If the President does not have confidence in his Secretary of State he should replace him, not supervise him with a personal aide." ²⁹ Putting aside the question of how readily a president will pay the political price of firing his secretary of state (or provoking his resignation), there can be little doubt that, at least over time, the national security adviser is, and is seen to be, a challenger to the secretary of state to fill the role of principal foreign policy adviser and spokesman.

There are three major reasons for this all-but-inevitable competition. First, managing the interagency machinery means becoming involved in policy implementation as well as policy formulation. Unless the NSC staff is directly involved in the follow-up, they neither can ensure that appropriate actions flow from the president's decisions, nor benefit from the real-world feedback on the basis of which policies can be corrected and adapted. They therefore press to clear cables, participate in interagency meetings, sit in discussions with foreign officials, and make trips abroad. But that involvement pushes the NSC staff, and especially the NSC adviser, out of the role of neutral policy coordination and into the mainstream of daily decisions. Soon,

it is hard to tell the "custodians" from the "advocates." As Kissinger acknowledges, such a situation can quickly pit the secretary of state against the national security adviser:

[As national security adviser] I had unique access to the President; my office cleared the key policy cables instructing our diplomats abroad. All this placed Secretary Rogers in an impossible position. If he approved a telegram or option before it was passed to the White House, he might see his judgment overruled in full view of his subordinates. If he waited until I had stated my view, he was in the position of either rubber-stamping or challenging what for all he knew had already been approved by the President.³⁰

Second, there is a natural tendency for foreign officials and the Congress to want to deal directly with those administration officials who seem to have the best access to the oval office. No matter how selflessly and neutrally discharged (and, as noted above, there is no assurance it will be), providing daily briefings to the president and regularly sitting in on his meetings, as well as performing the job of custodian and manager of the interagency process inevitably fosters that impression. Soon, embassy officials are making calls on NSC staff, visiting dignitaries request appointments with the national security adviser as well as the secretary of state, and members of Congress insist on being briefed by the NSC staff as well as (or instead of) by State Department officials.

Finally, the White House frequently reciprocates by succumbing to the temptation to use the NSC staff, and especially the NSC adviser, to function as the president's "personal emissary" with foreigners, to lobby the Congress on key foreign policy issues such as arms control or controversial sales, to give press backgrounders, and to explain administration policy to the public on the Sunday talk shows. The addition of a specific "Congressional relations" function to the NSC staff, the designation of a press secretary for the national security adviser, and calls for Senate confirmation of the incumbent are symptomatic of the trend. Before long, the NSC adviser not only is responsible for coordinating the interagency machinery, but may be--both in appearance and reality--challenging the secretary of state for the roles of principal foreign policy adviser and spokesman.

In sum, the division of labor suggested by Kissinger appears to be more realistic and

functional than the concentration of responsibility proposed by Haig. At the same time, it is highly unstable: the national security adviser will be constantly lured or pushed across the line separating his role from the responsibilities of the secretary of state. The latter, meanwhile, will be hard put not to regard the former as bureaucratic competitor (or, more rarely, ally) rather than a neutral manager. The very designation of the head of the NSC staff is symptomatic of the dilemma. The formal designation of the position is "assistant to the president for national security affairs," but practitioners and observers alike quickly and easily revert to what they regard as a more descriptive shorthand: national security *adviser*.

As a corollary, the conflicts between a Kissinger and a Rogers, and a Vance and a Brzezinski must be regarded as endemic to the system rather than the result of individual egos. Perhaps there is no better evidence of this proposition than Kissinger himself: for all of his advice and guidelines about how best to organize for national security, he ended up violating virtually every one of his own rules. In the end, however, there may be no better alternative to this messy state of affairs.

Conclusion

For all of its potential virtues, a grand strategy for the United States--in its most ambitious sense--probably is unobtainable. Calls for the President to report annually on our grand strategy reflect an understandable frustration with the apparent incoherence of our foreign policy decisions and actions, and a related dissatisfaction with the way in which we formulate policy. While there is no substitute for presidential leadership and direction in foreign policy, a requirement that he report once a year is unlikely to produce it. American culture and tradition, postwar trends, and contemporary political facts of life all conspire to defeat the objectives of such efforts.

Even if an administration somehow managed to fashion such a strategy for the purposes of its own internal guidance, a requirement to report on it to the Congress, much less to the

"American people," virtually guarantees that abstract rhetoric will drive out statements of clear priorities and concrete choices. The "state of the world" reports during the Nixon administration and, to a lesser extent, the *Annual Reports* of the Secretary of Defense are good illustrations of these pitfalls.

However, there is another, more modest view of "grand strategy." This perspective views grand strategy more as a *process* than a product. It is a conscious effort to strengthen the coherence and consistency of U.S. foreign policy--at least during the tenures of individual presidents if not across administrations--by improving the way in which we make it. In fact, one of the first products of a new administration's decision-making process can be what it might be tempted to call its "national security strategy."

The Nixon administration's "NSSM-3" and the Carter administration's "PRM-10" are good examples. What is noteworthy about these exercises is that they not only were an early test of the interagency process, but also that they performed important educational and socialization functions. The new administration officials were exposed to one another and to the career bureaucracy they had inherited as they tried to map the major strategic issues and choices. At least as important, the president and his senior advisers were immersed (some for the first time) in a panoply of foreign policy issues, and were obliged to measure their instincts and judgments against the hard realities and the analysis of the career professionals who served them. The decisions that resulted from these exercises, the respective "grand strategies" of the Nixon and Carter administrations, were in many respects of secondary significance: the process may have more important than the product. (In fact, the half-life of many of the decisions that flowed from NSSM-3 and PRM-10 was not very long.)

This analysis has considered two alternative views of the appropriate role of the secretary of state (and, by extension, the State Department) in the interagency process, each propounded by a former incumbent of that office. The Haig view is that the secretary of state ought to be the "single manager" under the president for all aspects of foreign policy. The Kissinger view, by

contrast, is that there ought to be a division of labor, with the secretary of state serving as the president's primary foreign policy adviser and spokesman, while the national security adviser is responsible for managing the interagency process.

The conclusion of this analysis is that putting the State Department in charge of the interagency process will make it harder to achieve consistency and coherence in its outputs. This is because the State Department inevitably is seen by the other bureaucratic players as an advocate (like them) rather than a disinterested adjudicator, and because they--rather than the State Department--control the military, economic, and intelligence resources needed to implement most major foreign policy decisions. As a result, even if the State Department prevails in the interagency debate, it can have little assurance that the course of action it recommended will be implemented. Put differently, if an issue is one which is properly the subject of interagency review at senior levels, then that interagency process should not be led by one of the interested parties. If the interested parties are clear-eyed, they probably would agree with this conclusion.

This leaves the NSC staff to perform the function. The problem is that Kissinger's conception of such an NSC staff, and the NSC adviser who heads it, is somewhat idealized: smart, expert, and tough, yet content to administer a process rather than push the policies which they believe are best. Presidents, accordingly, face a dilemma. Those who err on the side of selecting national security advisers who are "smart, expert, and tough" risk ending up with Kissingers who eclipse their secretaries of state, while those who err on the side of ensuring that their national security advisers will not step over the line to become alternative secretaries of state may end up with Richard Allens who are neither a help nor a threat to the secretary of state. Like all proper dilemmas, this one has no solution, only horns.

One must, however, choose. The "view from State" ought to be that, among the available possibilities, the NSC staff is best situated to coordinate the interagency process: the system--and each of its participants--needs an honest broker, and none of the agency-advocates

(including State) can play that role. To perform that function, it must be clearly in mind at the outset, and it should be the primary criterion applied in selecting NSC staff: as recent experience suggests, an NSC staff recruited on the basis of a different set of standards may fall short when called upon to manage the process.

There are few, if any, structural safeguards against the considerable risks that the NSC adviser and his staff will step--or be pushed--over the line that separates their responsibilities from those of the secretary of state and the State Department. The magnitude of those risks, as well as the prospects for avoiding them, depend largely on the particular incumbents, particularly on the president. But there appears to be no alternative to running those risks in order to achieve an interagency process whose output is a reasonably coherent and consistent foreign policy. That result would be no mean feat. It also would be an impressive step toward a "grand strategy" for the United States.

Notes

1. The views expressed in this paper are the author's and do not necessarily represent those of the RAND Corporation or any of its sponsors. The assistance and helpful comments of Donna Blank are gratefully acknowledged.
2. For a fascinating discussion of planning in the "organized anarchy" of the university, see: Michael D. Cohen and James G. March, *Leadership and Ambiguity*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), pp. 112-115.
3. It also might be noted in passing that these trends are not peculiar to the United States. Many European countries, which are often held up as models of both the desirability and feasibility of a grand strategy, seem to be experiencing similar pressures. Perhaps the two most striking examples are the UK and the FRG, where electoral victories by the political opposition promise wrenching shifts in foreign policy, i.e., dramatic overhaul of their respective grand strategies.
4. Ironically, a survey of the internal, classified *Defense Guidance*, issued at the beginning of each budget planning cycle to direct the preparation of defense programs and budgets, might well leave the same impression. This is at least as much a testament to a well-placed concern about leaks as it is evidence of the difficulty of setting priorities.
5. Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), p. 158.
6. Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 158. He gives very high marks to the reports--prepared by his NSC staff rather than State--that eventually emerged, describing them as: "... some of the most thoughtful governmental statements on foreign policy. . . . They served as rough guides to the bureaucracy. They were unusually candid. They were invaluable in conveying nuances of change [sic] to foreign governments." Kissinger acknowledges, however, that: "To our sorrow, we never managed to get across its basic purpose of raising fundamental questions and expressing a philosophy." He ascribes this failure to the media's preoccupation with "hot news" and "credibility gaps" and, later, with Watergate rather to any shortcomings in the documents themselves.
7. This is not to argue that political incrementalism always serves the nation well. See, for example, Leslie H. Gelb and Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked*. (Washington: Brookings, 1979).
8. It should go without saying that a grand strategy cannot be imported, whole cloth, into the administration from some outside organization or think tank.
9. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*. (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), p. 74.
10. Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), pp. 35-36. Perhaps surprisingly, Brzezinski confirms Vance's complaint, but explains that he increasingly came to fill the role because "It turned out that Vance . . . was not an effective communicator and the President started encouraging me to speak up more." Brzezinski, p. 29. Carter himself blames both Vance's reluctance and Brzezinski's eagerness. Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*. (New York: Bantam, 1982), p. 54.
11. Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat*. (New York: Macmillan, 1984), p. 12.

12. Haig, p. 12.

13. Haig, p. 58. Haig, of course, believed that Reagan agreed with this view. He quotes the President as telling reporters: "... [L]et me say what I said a number of times before. The Secretary of State is my primary adviser on foreign affairs, and in that capacity, he is the chief formulator and spokesman for foreign policy in this Administration. There is not, nor has there ever been, any question about this." Quoted in Haig, p. 149.

14. The point should not be overstated. The relatively rapid rotation of foreign service officers among diverse jobs, and the reach of new administrations down into the career ranks as they staff the national security bureaucracy produce many of the same results--both good and bad--of high turnover. In fact, the State Department could strengthen both its bureaucratic position and its contribution to the policy process by encouraging more specialization among foreign service officers and, in particular, more specialization and greater continuity in Washington.

15. See: "The Document that Sowed the Seed of Haig's Demise," *Washington Post*, July 11, 1982, p. C1.

16. Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*. (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1978), p. 340.

17. Carter, p. 52.

18. Brzezinski, p. 74.

19. Brzezinski, p. 71.

20. Quoted in Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power*. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1976), p. 110. Roosevelt went on to explain that, bad as the State Department was, it was nothing compared to the Navy.

21. Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 26. Kissinger continues: "... Nixon and I had a brief conversation about his choice [of William Rogers] for Secretary of State. He said he was looking for a good negotiator, rather than a policymaker--a role he reserved for himself and his Assistant for National Security Affairs."

22. Nixon, p. 339.

23. Brzezinski, p. 71.

24. Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 44.

25. Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 30. He expresses the same view in the second volume of his memoirs, which includes his tenure as secretary of state: "I have become convinced that the running of interdepartmental machinery ought to be preeminently the responsibility of the security adviser (except perhaps in a crisis). . . . The preparation of options, which is in the main what interdepartmental machinery does, should be the province of a security adviser. . . ." Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 437.

26. Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982), p. 437. Even in retrospect, however, Kissinger remains less than enthusiastic about the department he headed.

He continues: "To elicit that quality of work is a most daunting task for even the most strong-willed Secretary of State. For he runs up against the organization of the Department and its allergy to conceptual thought."

- 27. Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 30.
- 28. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 437.
- 29. Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 30.
- 30. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 418.